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ANOTHER VIEW OF THE KENSINGTON RUNE STONE

RASMUS B. ANDERSON

When the so-called Kensington Rune Stone in 1898 was brought forth from its sleep beneath the roots of a tree on a farm near Kensington, Minnesota, it produced but a slight ripple of sensation. A photographic copy of the inscription on this stone was sent to me and to others supposed to be somewhat familiar with the runic alphabet and with Old Norse history, for our opinion, and I think I may safely say that we all agreed in declaring it to be a rather clumsy fraud. As a result the matter received but little further attention, and Mr. Olaf Ohman, on whose farm the stone was found, converted it into a stepping-stone to his granary. In course of time Mr. H. R. Holand, now of Ephraim, Wisconsin, happened to visit Mr. Ohman and got possession of the discarded rune stone, and how he ever since has been exploiting it is presumably well known to my readers. The inscription is a fraud on the very face of it, and the proofs of this fact are most abundant.

I do not at present care to enter into a detailed discussion of all the evidence against the genuineness of this runic inscription. I will, however, mention three facts that seem to me quite conclusive.

(1) The date at the end of the inscription is 1362. Now it is a well-known fact that the runes were extensively used in the north of Europe before the eleventh century, but with the introduction of Christianity the people got ink, parchment, and the Roman alphabet; the runes very rapidly passed into desuetude, and long before 1362 their use had been wholly abandoned.

(2) In the very beginning of the inscription occurs the word "opdhagelsefærdh," and the word "opdagelse," which means discovery, had not yet been incorporated into any Scandinavian tongue.

(3) In the inscription we also find the word "rise," meaning journey. The word "reisa" is found in the old Scandinavian languages, but there it invariably means to raise, to erect: thus, in phrases stating that a son erects a memorial stone on his father's grave. But "reisa," meaning a journey, is a word of recent importation in Scandinavia.

If an inscription should be brought to the notice of the public with a claim that it was say 200 years old and was found to contain such words as automobile, telephone, bicycle, wireless, aeroplane, and so on ad libitum, the opinion of a learned university professor would not be required to establish its fraudulent origin.

Perhaps I ought to add that the fact that in the very first line of the inscription eight of the supposed explorers are described as Goths, that is, men from Sweden, is sufficient to throw suspicion on its genuineness, for it is well known that those who made voyages to Iceland, Greenland, Vinland, and to the western islands, generally, came not from Sweden or Denmark, but from Norway.

As is well known, Mr. Holand several years ago took this rune stone to Europe and had it examined by experts in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, but these all declared it to be without any historical value.

And now I have a short story to tell my readers of an incident that occurred to me ten years ago. I made a statement of it in my paper *Amerika* at the time, but as the interest in the Kensington stone was then generally on the wane, my story did not attract as wide attention as I had hoped.

These are the facts:

In 1910, on invitation, I delivered at Stanley, in the north-western part of North Dakota, an oration on the seventeenth

of May, Norway's Fourth of July. Stanley was then a village of about one thousand inhabitants. The weather was fine; the speaking and music were from a platform erected in the middle of the main street; all business was suspended; and a large number of people had come from the surrounding country and from neighboring villages, so that I was favored with a large audience. In the evening there was a dance in a large hall over a corner drug store. I was asked to attend this ball, but as I was to take an early morning train for St. Paul, I decided to retire early at my hotel. But I stepped into the drug store where ice cream, soda water, and cigars were sold. On entering the drug store I heard a man making a vigorous speech in praise of the orator of the day. He told the people how that gentleman had been a professor at the University of Wisconsin, how he had served a term as United States minister to Denmark, how he had perpetrated book after book extolling the culture of the Scandinavians, and insisted that he was entitled to far more appreciation than was generally accorded him. This advocate of mine was attired in the clothes of a workingman, more or less covered with dry mud, but his speech revealed a man of more than ordinary culture. If he had been an Irishman I should have been sure that he had kissed the Blarney Stone. He could quote Swedish poetry and Latin and Greek phrases with absolute accuracy. He was well up in literature, history, and philosophy. I admired him, not because he had showered compliments on me and handed me a cigar, but because he was a man of wonderful intelligence and of thorough education, and still did not feel above doing common work.

In addressing him I said, "Who in the world are you, anyway?"

He told me that he was a Swede, that his name was Andrew Anderson, that in his younger days he had been a student at the celebrated University of Upsala, and that in 1882 he had quit the University, packed his books, and emi-

grated to America, settling in Hoffman, Minnesota, where he now owned a valuable farm. He had for years worked on Jim Hill's Great Northern Railroad and was now accidentally at Stanley as foreman in a dump on the great magnate's road. In honor of Norway's independence day he had given the men under him a holiday and with them he had come to town to take part in the celebration and to hear me speak.

Hoffman, Minnesota! This set thoughts whirling in my brain. I asked him if that was not near Kensington and whether he knew a man there by the name of Olaf Ohman, on whose land a stone with a runic inscription had been found.

"Of course I know Mr. Ohman. He is a neighbor of mine, and he is my brother-in-law."

He unfolded to me that Olaf Ohman had come from Helsingeland in Sweden in 1875 and had settled as a farmer near the village of Kensington.

Andrew Anderson added, "He is a man in easy circumstances. He was educated as a mechanic in Sweden and is thoroughly skilled in the handling of all kinds of mechanics' tools. He is not a college-bred man like myself, but he has always been a great reader. His favorite books are Alexander von Humboldt's *Cosmos* and a work in Swedish called the *Gospel of Nature*."

At this point I invested in a package of Havanas and compelled Andrew Anderson to go with me to the hotel where I was stopping and on arriving there we went to my room where I closed the door. I prodded him with all manner of questions in regard to the rune stone and I found him very familiar with its history.

In the course of our conversation he gave me an interesting account of a deposed Swedish minister by name Fogelblad. This Reverend Mr. Fogelblad was a graduate from the department of theology in the University of Upsala and for some years he had served as a regular pastor of the national church in Sweden; but he had grown so dissipated that he

had to be deposed. Having lost his position and standing, he had emigrated to America and had found his way into Minnesota, where he visited the various Swedish settlements as a typical literary tramp, paying for his living at the various homes where he stopped by giving entertaining and instructive conversations and writing letters to friends in Sweden for people who were not themselves handy with the pen. On these wanderings he came to Hoffman and Kensington and fairly ingratiated himself with Andrew Anderson and Olaf Ohman. Both of these men were deeply interested in cultural topics and the tramp Fogelblad had a large storehouse of knowledge to draw from. In fact Mr. Fogelblad made Andrew Anderson's home his headquarters and there he died about the year 1900. Andrew Anderson reverently closed Fogelblad's eyes in death and took him to his final resting-place. I may add that Anderson and Ohman and Fogelblad had long since abandoned the Lutheran Church and by their neighbors were classed as liberals in religious matters. The Reverend Mr. Fogelblad, so Anderson told me, was well versed in the subject of the Old Norse runes. Anderson, himself, had brought with him from Upsala, Fryxell's great historical work which contains a full account of the runes with facsimiles of the various runic alphabets. He loaned this book to his brother-in-law, Olaf Ohman, and oftentimes Fogelblad, Anderson, and Ohman spent the evenings or Sundays together discussing the runes. Fogelblad and Anderson would write out long stories with runic characters and then read and translate what they had written to Ohman. In further evidence of Fogelblad's attainments, I may add that he wrote an ambitious book called *The Age of Learning* (*Upplysningens Tidehvarf*). It has no important bearing on the subject, perhaps, but I may add that the three were all very proud to consider themselves wholly emancipated from the dogmas of the Church.

So we now have here Olaf Ohman, who settled near Kensington in 1875, and on whose farm the notorious rune stone was found at the root of a young tree in 1898; Andrew Anderson, who arrived from Sweden and settled there in 1882; and the Reverend Mr. Fogelblad, who came to Minnesota about the same time and spent much time at the homes of Ohman and Anderson. All three were deeply interested in the runes and had made a pretty thorough study of the subject. Either Anderson or Fogelblad could prepare an inscription on paper and the mechanic, Ohman, could readily give the runes permanency by chiseling them out on a stone.

Mr. Anderson, whom I can best describe as a diamond in the rough, did not, I must admit, in my long and interesting conversation with him, confess that either one of the three had had anything to do with the much advertised Kensington Rune Stone, but I will add with emphasis that he did give me several significant winks. When I pressed the question whether he and Fogelblad had not concocted this runic inscription hoax, he told me that under no law was a man expected to incriminate himself and so far as Fogelblad was concerned, he would be the last man to cast aspersions on the memory of a departed friend.

The fact that Ohman, Anderson, and Fogelblad were all three Swedes throws a flood of light on the first two words of the inscription which begins: "Eight Goths." Considering the high intelligence of Olaf Ohman and his deep interest in literature, science, and history, can any of the defenders of this rune stone explain how he put this wonderful find to such sordid use as to serve as a stepping-stone to his granary? Surely he would not be guilty of such vandalism, if he had the slightest faith in its genuineness as an historical relic. Would he not rather have given it a place of honor in his parlor or library?

Andrew Anderson and I parted in the small hours of the morning with a most cordial handshake and as the very best

of friends. This interview has served to solve in my mind with entire satisfaction all the mystery surrounding this much exploited rune stone, which, from whatever point of view it is considered, is nothing but a poorly devised fraud.

How easy it would be for three cronies in Madison to carve some words and figures on a slab of stone, then some dark night bury it under a tree on the eastern shores of Lake Monona, and finally, after a few years, bring it to the light of day and claim that it must be a relic of pre-Columbian times.

And now, my gentle reader, I leave the matter to you and ask you to draw your own conclusions in regard to the true origin of the Kensington Rune Stone. So far as I know Anderson and Ohman are still living near Kensington. May I not therefore suggest that anyone sufficiently interested can make a pilgrimage to their homes and interview them and so probe this matter further? I have no doubt that the result would be a complete vindication of the conclusion I have reached as to the authenticity of this runic inscription. May I not also suggest that this fake has now been exploited and written up far more than it deserves and that pen, ink, paper, and brains may be employed to some better purpose?